

Patient Online at Dartmouth-Hitchcock – Interactive Patient Care Web Site

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Abstract

This poster presentation will demonstrate the value to practices of providing online interactive communication tools to their patients by presenting Dartmouth-Hitchcock's successful implementation of "Patient Online". This tool extends our clinical and administrative functions directly to patients using a personal web site product that supports HIPAA compliant clinical communication, patient appointment scheduling, prescription renewals, and referral requests with the practice.

Project:

Dartmouth-Hitchcock is a multi-specialty group practice of 650 providers in Northern New England, in conjunction with Mary Hitchcock Memorial Hospital, its academic tertiary care hospital partner. In October of 2001, Patient Online was fully deployed in two Dartmouth-Hitchcock community practices, as the first interactive health care tool of its kind available to the public in the state of New Hampshire. These two practices, Dartmouth-Hitchcock Manchester and Dartmouth-Hitchcock Nashua, encompass more than 150 providers and an active patient pool greater than 100,000.

Patient Online is a secure internet-based communication tool, whose purpose is to increase communication between the patient and his or her health care team, thereby improving their relationship with one another. This service is available to patients any time of the day or night for non-emergent needs, with a response time from the practice within 24 hours with the exception of weekends or holidays, which would be handled the following business day.

Through the implementation of Patient Online, Dartmouth-Hitchcock has successfully improved patient care. The goals met through the implementation of Patient Online included the following: increased communication between patient and physician; increased patient satisfaction and retention by providing convenient access to our practice for administrative items and information; increased practice efficiency and lower costs; and an improved competitive position in the marketplace.

By achieving these goals we have been able to document significant benefits of Patient Online to both clinical operations and patient care. The improvement in patient satisfaction is attributable to the patient's belief that by providing Patient Online, the spectrum of customer service has increased and includes more accessibility to their physician. Additionally patients report that Patient Online is easy to use, mentioning the quick response time and benefit of communicating with their health care team on their own time. This service removes the negative experience associated with extended holding patterns via traditional phone communications. The utility of Patient Online allows patients to have more control over their health care and actively participate in their care management process.

Increased staff efficiency is another documented benefit of Patient Online. Triage nurses at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Manchester reduced the average time to resolve patient questions from 10 minutes to 5 minutes when using Patient Online. For example, with the telephone, calls initiated by patients tend to create multiple, additional calls due to "telephone tag" between staff and patient. However, with Patient Online, secure patient messages can be routed to the correct staff member for response and handled by that staff member at a time that is convenient in their workflow.

Patient Online has demonstrated a reduced "no-show" rate in patients that use this service. As a result of our research, we have measured a 42% reduction in "no-show" appointments. This is attributed to increased patient access to verify the date, time and location of their appointments as well as the ability to cancel and reschedule at a more convenient time.

Finally our poster presentation will demonstrate how online communication has differentiated our practice thereby improving our position in the marketplace.